

# **PREPARING AMERICA TO RESPOND EFFECTIVELY (PREPARE) ACT OF 2003**

## **BILL SUMMARY September 24, 2003**

The Preparing America to Respond Effectively Act (PREPARE Act) is a comprehensive approach to prepare the nation to respond to acts of terrorism. The legislation improves the first responder funding system, bolsters information sharing, threat warnings, communications and equipment interoperability, integrates private companies and the public into response plans, and provides grants to educate schoolchildren to be prepared. Major elements of the legislation include:

### ***Meeting the Needs of First Responders***

The PREPARE Act moves beyond the current debate over the first responder grant system by creating a method to identify and provide what cities, counties, and states need in order to be prepared to handle a terrorist attack. As the Council on Foreign Relations Task Force recently stated, “*The absence of a functioning methodology to determine national requirements for emergency preparedness constitutes a public policy crisis.* Establishing national standards that define levels of preparedness is a critical first step toward determining the nature and extent of additional requirements and the human and financial resources needed to fulfill them.” The Gilmore Commission’s most recent report to Congress states, “...without a comprehensive approach to measuring how well we are doing with the resources being applied at any point in time, there will be very little prospect for answering the question ‘*How well prepared are we?*’.”

The PREPARE Act addresses these findings by creating a Task Force on Standards for Terrorism Preparedness, which will develop a methodology for local and state governments to use to determine what resources (e.g., personnel, equipment, training, etc.) are needed to be prepared for a terrorist attack. For the first time, we will know how prepared we are, and where more is needed.

The Act then creates PREPARE Grants to provide every jurisdiction with what it needs to be prepared to defend against terrorist attack, meeting the highest priority needs first. Currently, there is no way to establish priorities. The Act consolidates all terrorism preparedness grants in one DHS office in order to streamline interaction with state and local officials.

### ***Making Sense of Threat Alerts***

The PREPARE Act requires the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to reform the threat advisory system so it can issue alerts to the affected geographic area or industry sector. The Act mandates that DHS will notify Congress before issuing threat advisories, provide threat information, and recommend actions at the state and local level, for the general public, and the private sector, as appropriate. In addition, the Act requires the Department to reimburse personnel costs incurred by local and state governments when the threat level is increased.

### ***Improving Information Sharing***

The PREPARE Act requires the Administration to clarify DHS’s responsibilities for sharing and receiving information with local and state governments. The Act provides support for obtaining

security clearances and equipment that local and state law enforcement officials need to receive and use classified intelligence.

***Providing Interoperable Communications and Equipment***

The PREPARE Act requires DHS, with other agencies, to ensure that first responder equipment and training standards are developed, and that such equipment is interoperable within the first responder communities. The Act authorizes \$20 million to give every state and major metropolitan area the immediate capability to connect radios of different responder agencies.

***Encouraging Participation of “Second Responders”***

The PREPARE Act recognizes that local and state emergency officials are the first to respond to a terrorist attack. The Act, however, also takes into account the public volunteers, the private companies, and other groups that play important roles in the longer term response. The PREPARE Act stresses the importance of public training and education, and expands current programs to link company resources with emergency response.

***Educating Schoolchildren to be Prepared***

The PREPARE Act authorizes a three-year grant program for public elementary and secondary schools to develop and implement instruction regarding age-appropriate skills to prepare for and respond to a man-made emergency or a natural disaster.